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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a two-credit, one-semester course on the instructional film, which has been taught at Southern Illinois University. The class meets twice a week: the first of the weekly sessions is used for lectures and guest speakers, and the second session is used for viewing and analysis of films. The paper describes topics covered in class sessions and provides a list of assignments given to students, a course schedule, a list of films shown, an interview guide sheet for interviewing teachers about their use of informational films, and a film analysis sheet. (GW)

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Teaching a Course on the Informational Film

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Annual Conference, University Film Association
University of Maryland, August, 1977

The informational film is like O-positive blood. It is the most common type, and therefore, in a sense, the most important.

In 1976, about 175 feature films were started in the U.S. By contrast, thousands of informational films were made, not including newsfilms.

The chances of a film department graduate getting into feature film production must be near zero. But the chances that a graduate, if he does get work in the film industry, will work on informational films are very high.

I cannot speak for other schools, but at SIU-C, our courses lean heavily toward experimental, documentary, and dramatic filmmaking. About two years ago, it occurred to me that it might be worthwhile to try offering a nonproduction course on the informational film. Our department executive officer, Peter Bukalski, agreed. Accordingly, a two-credit, one-semester course was given in the spring semester of 1977.

The class of 23 students met twice a week, with the Tuesday sessions used for lectures and speakers and the Thursday sessions used for films and film analysis.

For years I have used a classification of films based not upon content but upon the kinds of behavior modification which the major types are designed to bring about. The classification is simply this:

Record films.
Skill films.
Informational films.
Persuasive films.
    Propaganda.
    Advertising.
    Documentary.
Dramatic films.
Experimental films.

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At the first meeting of the class, we discussed the classification. In order to bring out the basic difference between skill films and informational films, we briefly went over the research on skill films, done in the Instructional Film Research Program at the Pennsylvania State University in the late forties. We also saw a skill film, produced by the IFRP, which incorporated the principles established by the IFPR research.

We then discussed the distinctions among the other types of films, after which we embarked on consideration of the informational films, the type which is primarily a transmitter of facts, concepts, and processes.

We went on to discuss learning theory and research findings related to film-mediated informational learning. Next, we covered film techniques, using my "junk film." This is a reel of examples of film techniques which I culled several years ago from films which our Learning Resources Service was going to discard. The reel includes continuity techniques, animation, time-lapse, slow-motion, cinemicrography, etc. It was used because some of the students had not studied filmmaking.

Our first speaker was Jerry Hostetler, who is in charge of the SIU-C Learning Resources Service film library. He described techniques of film selection, explaining among other things why teachers find it difficult to use long films, why the popularity of some titles requires that the library have several prints, etc. The following week, we took a "field trip" to the film library, where the students became acquainted with the steps which must be taken to get a rental film to a user and back on the shelf.

The next spaker was from the "real world." Philip Enoch, a graduate of the Ohio State University, is a talented producer-director for the Chromalloy Corporation in St. Louis. He brought several films and spoke in other classes also. Mr. Enoch spoke candidly of the realities of being a corporate film producer, readily answering questions about target audiences, financing, distribution, and the pressures of the job.

The students had only hazy ideas about what a single concept film is, but Steve Knudsen changed that with a highly informative talk and presentation of several films from the Iowa State University project in the production of single concept films on plant science. He, too, spoke in other classes.

Newsfilm is informational film. Our one session on newsfilm consisted of a showing of Ray Fielding's Yesterday's Witness, with brief discussion the following Thursday.

Our last speaker was Fred Jurgemeyer of the SIU-C Division of Instructional Materials, Department of Curriculum, Instruction, and Media. Mr. Jurgemeyer, to a certain extent, played the devil's advocate by explaining how a number of devices compete with film for teacher's use. In the course of doing this, he mentioned the special strengths and weaknesses of print, slides, and audio tapes, etc.

One of the assignments called for each student to interview an SIU-C teacher who was known to use many films. It turned out to be possibly the best part of the course. A list of teachers who use films was secured from the Learning Resources Service. I called enough of them individually to be sure that they would be willing to be interviewed. There were no refusals.

Each student had to write a brief report of the interview, and also had to make a short oral summary in class on the next-to-last day of the course. The students generally were impressed by the fact that all of the teachers seemed to feel genuinely that films are of great value in their teaching. Repeatedly the teachers brought out the fact that films enabled them to show things which could not otherwise be experienced by their students.

If the course is taught again, we will not be able to repeat the interviews, of course, but we can invite some of the teachers to come to class, show films, and explain why films are useful in their teaching.

For the Thursday sessions, a film analysis sheet or check sheet was developed and revised twice. The sheet seemed to serve its purpose, which was to get the students to become better aware of how the techniques available to the maker of informational films can be used. It also provided space for notes on films' shortcomings. For example, we saw a low-budget film entitled Cheese and Cheesemaking. In the commentary for this film, the word "rennet" and the names of some Italian-style cheeses are spoken but hardly recognizable. The students as a result became aware of the value of superimposed labels, and coincidentally of the value of A and B roll printing.

At the end of the term the students were interviewed individually. They seemed in general to feel that the course had made them aware of some aspects of film which were, to them, new and significant. With no exception they thought that the interview with a film-using teacher was a valuable experience.

Copies of the schedule, lists of films, assignments, interview guide sheet, and film analysis sheet follow. The assignments were designed to get the students familiar with the Learning Resources Service film library catalogue and request procedures, to acquaint them with the kinds of research studies reviewed by Hoban and Van Ormer and by Reid and MacLennan, to make them aware of the material to be found in the catalogues and indexes, and to have them become familiar with the way one audio-visual textbook describes the place and use of films in education.

C&P 470A, Section 1, The Informational Film, Spring 1977

Assignments

1. Select for the class a short (no longer than 15 minutes) film and two alternatives from pages_____ in the SIU-C Learning Resources catalogue. Be sure to include the number and the running time. Turn these in to the instructor by _____. There is a catalogue on a small counter near the receptionist's desk in LRS. There is also one at the librarian's counter in the Education Library, fourth floor, Morris Library. Try to pick informational films which sound interesting, which may have unusual techniques, etc. The schedule of film showing for the second half of the semester will be made up from your selections.

2. Read and summarize the following:*
   A. In Hoban and Van Ormer, Instructional Film Research, 1918-1950:
      1. Nelson study, p. 8-19.
      2. Neu study, p. 8-24.
      3. McTavish study, p. 8-34.
   B. In Reid and MacLennan, Research in Instructional Television and Film:
      1. Anderson study, p. 25.
      2. Hartman study, p. 85.

   These two books are on two-hour reserve.

3. Interview as SIU-C teacher who uses films and write up a report of the interview. The instructor will give you a name.

4. Visit the instructional materials files, southwest area of the Education library, and get out the producer's catalogues for Encyclopdia Britannica films. Write a description of any one of them, including purchase and rental information.

5. Also, from the instructional materials file, write a general description of one of these film rental catalogues: Contemporary/McGraw-Hill, or Macmillan/Audio-Brandon.

6. For Sightlines and two of the other publications listed below, write a general description of the periodical plus a more specific description of the kinds of information provided which relate to the informational film. List the titles of any new informational films which are described in any one special article or regular feature.

   Educational Technology
   Business Screen
   Film News
   Sightlines
   Media and Methods
   Previews

   Do the same for three of three of the following:

   Arithmetic Teacher
   English Journal
   History Teacher
   Journal of Home Economics
   School Shop
   Science Teacher
   Speech Teacher
   Vocational Guidance Quarterly
   Wilson Library Journal

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*For a more recent review of instructional film research, see Wight, Warland, The Relevance of Selected Theories for Developing Systematic Research on Film Communication, University of Washington, 1970. This is a doctoral dissertation done under the direction of Gerald M. Torkelson, University Microfilms No. 71-8560.

7. Summarize the chapter on films in Brown, Lewis, and Harcleroad, AV Instruction: Media and Methods. This summary can be done in outline form. There are several copies of this book in the Education Library.

8. Look through Hope Reports and write a description of the kinds of information in them which relate to the informational film.

9. Describe either one of these publications:
   Educational Media Index
   Index to 16 mm Educational Films
   They are in the first aisle in the stacks just northwest of the librarian's counter in the Education Library.

10. Look through the Educator's Guide to Free Films. The latest edition is at the librarian's counter in the Education Library. Find out what kinds of films are circulated by three corporations and include some of their titles which appear to be informational films.

11. Turn in a film analysis sheet for each film seen at the Thursday sessions.

All of the written work resulting from these assignments is to be handed in at the end of the term. The exact due date will be given out later. See me if you run into problems.

--JM

SCHEDULE

		TUESDAY	THURSDAY
Jan.	18	Film types	Film showings every Thursday
	25	Learning from film	
Feb.	1	Research on infromational film production variables	
	8	Research on informational film use variables	
	15	Production techniques	
	22	Jerry Hostetler, SIU-C Learning Resources Service	
Mar.	1	Visit to LRS	
	8	Test	
	15	Yesterday's Witness	
	22	Spring vacation	
	29	Philip Enoch Chromalloy Corporation	
Apr.	5	Steve Knudsen Iowa State University	
	12	Fred Jurgemeyer, SIU-C Instructional Materials Division	
	19	"Zettlism" (aesthetic enhancement) vs. "McIntyrism" (straightforward approaches)	
	26	Oral reports of interviews	
May	3	Videodisk demonstration (Could not be arranged)	

FILMS SHOWN

Cheese and Cheesemaking

Care of Pets

Stamina

Poison Plants

Open Your Eyes

Principles of Baking

Digestion in Our Bodies

Sound Waves and Their Sources

Why Foods Spoil

Piaget's Developmental Theories

The Farmer in a Changing America

The Money Tree

Expressionism

Darwin

The American Indian

Light and Color

Personal Qualities for Job Success

Life in the Sea

Making a Film

Victoria Falls

Plant Traps

Energy Sources of the Future

Snakes and How They Live

Arts and Crafts of Mexico

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I am to interview

_____Dept._____Phone_____

First, make the appointment. If you have trouble making contact with the teacher, talk to the secretary and try to find out when the teacher is usually in. Be sure you keep the appointment.

Get information such as:

In what kinds of courses the teacher uses films.
The kinds of informational films (subject matter) the teacher uses.
How he works them into his courses. (Introduction, summary, discussion, test items)
Why he thinks they are valuable.
Whether he could use some films which have not been made for his field.
Whether he has a limited budget for off-campus rentals.
Whether he runs the projector himself.
Whether he ever stops the projector to explain a point.
Whether he believes students can successfully take notes during a showing.
Whether he ever repeats a film.
Whether he thinks he generally is able to show films under good viewing conditions (dark room, etc)
What films he considers to be very good.
What other items which your conversation may lead to.

But--keep the interview short, and be sure to express thanks.

C&P 470A The Informational Film

Film Analysis Sheet*

Film Title _____ Name _____

Place a ✔ before the technique if it is present and adequate, and ✔✔ if the quality is unusually good or bad, then explain below.

Introduction to the film
Color
Black-and-white
Motion
Filmograph
Condensed time and space
Settings:
1. Realistic
2. Cameo
Lighting
Composition of the image
Subject matter presentation:
1. Exposition
2. Rate of development
3. Visual continuity
4. Picture-commentary fit
5. Editing covers action
6. Repetition for emphasis
Performance
1. Performance only
2. Dramatic or narrative performance
Silent with titles
Soundtrack
1. Clarity and balance
Music:
1. Terminal (head and tail)
2. Background
3. Sync
4. Quality and appropriateness

Sound effects
Lip-sync dialogue
Commentary:
1. Vocabulary appropriateness
2. Rate appropriateness
3. Explanatory quality
4. Complements action
5. First person
6. Passive voice
7. Imperative mode
Commentator:
1. Voice quality
2. Anonymous
3. "Name"
Animation
1. 2D
2. 3D
3. Dissolve
4. Pop-on
5. Scratch-off
6. Cycle
7. Straight-ahead or full
Charts and graphs:
1. Static
2. Moving
Superimposed graphics:
1. Arrows, circles, etc.
2. Labels
3. Captions repeating commentary or dialogue

Intertitles:
1. Inserted statements
2. Inserted questions
Puppets
Justified camera movements including zooms
Macrocinematography
Cinemicrography
Time-lapse
Slow-motion
X-ray cinematography
Split-frame image
Freeze frame
Double exposure
Reverse action
Inserts:
1. Sign-language narrator
2. Other
Summary of the film

Comments and explanation of double-checked items:

*As revised October, 1977.